

**Chairman Richard Shelby Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,
and Related Agencies**

**Hearing to review the FY2016 funding requests and budget justifications
for the U.S. Department of Justice**

May 7, 2015

Welcome to today's Commerce, Justice, and Science Subcommittee hearing examining the Department of Justice's Fiscal Year 2016 budget request.

First, let me welcome Attorney General Loretta Lynch to her first hearing before this subcommittee as she assumes the important responsibility of serving as our nation's chief law enforcement officer.

As you begin your two-year term as Attorney General, I believe that it is critical for you to return the office of Attorney General to its constitutional purpose, which is to enforce the laws of the land – not the decrees and whims of this President.

The President has a White House Counsel and plenty of attorneys arguing for his points of view on immigration, privacy, environmental regulations, and more. The Attorney General is the servant of the laws and citizens of the United States, not the President.

I want to encourage you, Ms. Lynch, to consider this perspective carefully as you begin your service in a job that is critical to our democracy and the rule of law.

I am deeply troubled by your support of the President's unilateral executive actions, which provide amnesty to millions of illegal immigrants.

Fortunately, this sweeping policy change – undertaken without input from Congress – has been stayed by the courts while a detailed review is conducted through the lens of the law and Constitution.

I hope that while this litigation is pending, progress will be made on key responsibilities that are within the Department's jurisdiction, such as the Executive Office for Immigration Review.

The President's 2016 budget seeks a funding level of \$482 million for this office, which is \$135 million above the current 2015 funding level.

Significant improvements and reforms are needed in our immigration court system in order to address the approximately 440,000 pending cases – some of which involve unaccompanied children.

This backlog equates to a waiting period of several years before a case is heard. This delay is unacceptable.

While the needs are great for our immigration courts, I have serious reservations about such a large funding increase when inefficiencies and management concerns have yet to be addressed within this office.

In your new role, I am interested in hearing your suggestions and recommendations for prioritizing spending for the Department's most important and pressing missions involving national security, law enforcement, and criminal justice.

The President's 2016 budget request for the Department of Justice totals \$29 billion, which is \$2 billion above the 2015 enacted level.

While funding for the Department of Justice is one of the federal government's highest priorities, we simply cannot afford such an increase in spending while operating under our current budget constraints.

I am particularly concerned that even in the midst of the current fiscal climate, the President has proposed new grant programs and initiatives that would further stretch the Department's spending.

When it comes to law enforcement, your arrival at the Department comes at a critical time of needed leadership.

Since our hearing earlier this spring with the Department's law enforcement chiefs, we have seen the departures of the ATF Director and the DEA Administrator.

I hope that you will pay particular attention to these law enforcement agencies to ensure that they faithfully execute their duties during this time of change.

As an example, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has a rule pending that would impose burdensome and unnecessary regulations regarding firearms that are lost or stolen in transit.

However, the ATF's own statistics indicate that this number is insignificant and should not be cause for concern. It certainly does not warrant such encumbering regulations.

Oversight and accountability remain a top priority for this subcommittee.

I have consistently expressed my displeasure to your predecessor regarding the Department's resistance to cooperating with the DOJ Inspector General.

I continue to hear from the Inspector General that his office is having difficulties in obtaining the documents needed to do their job.

I urge you to work closely with the Inspector General to make sure that he and his staff can successfully complete their reviews and audits of the Department.

As I have outlined, the Department faces many challenges that will require fiscal support. The path for making meaningful progress runs through this subcommittee.

As you begin your tenure Ms. Lynch, I want to express the subcommittee's hope that we will have a productive and constructive working relationship.

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